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February 10, 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. TOLSON -
MR. NICHOLS
MR. LADD
MR. BELMONT

This morning Mr. Philip L. Graham, President and Publisher of The Washington Post, called to see me. Mr. Graham stated he had called to see me about a matter that had been giving him quite some concern and that while there was nothing in which I could be of assistance to him, he did want me to know the facts and background.

Mr. Graham stated that shortly following the Harry Dexter White matter, Alan Barth, one of the editorial writers of The Washington Post, had written a very lengthy memorandum about the use of FBI reports in the Harry Dexter White case and the defects in the same, which was justification for President Truman and others not acting upon FBI reports when they were submitted in 1945 and 1946, etc. Mr. Graham stated he glanced over this memorandum, it being a very lengthy one, and that the views expressed, in a general way, were entirely contrary to the position which The Washington Post had taken and did not coincide with their editorial policy. He stated he so advised Mr. Barth and that ended the matter so far as he, Mr. Graham, was concerned.

He said he heard nothing more from Mr. Barth about this matter until about ten days ago when he happened to pass Barth in the corridor of the Post Building and Barth told him he had written an article along the lines of the memorandum which he had sent to Mr. Graham some weeks previously. Mr. Graham stated he asked Barth what publication he had written it for as he, Graham, had, of course, no intention of allowing any such expression of view in The Washington Post. Barth told Mr. Graham he had sent the article to "Harper's Magazine." Mr. Graham stated he informed Barth that he did not desire the article to be printed as it did not conform to the views or policies of The Washington Post and since he, Barth, was an editorial writer of that paper, the article was bound to be associated with The Washington Post and would bring on criticism and controversy which was not warranted in so far as The Post was concerned. Barth stated it was too late to recall the article as it was already on the presses and that he, Barth, assumed, of course, that Mr. Graham did not wish to act as a censor of Barth's personal writings, nor would Mr. Graham want to deprive Mr. Barth of his freedom of speech.

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Mr. Graham stated he was greatly annoyed by this and debated as to whether he should immediately dismiss Barth but after thinking it over he decided that this would bring on an immediate outburst of criticism from certain ultra-liberal papers, such as the St. Louis Post Dispatch, "Newsweek," "Time," etc., and would make Barth into more of a martyr than he is entitled to be. He stated, therefore, he called "Harper's Magazine" and insisted that in a foreword to the article it be clearly set forth that the views as expressed by Barth were not in accord with the views of The Washington Post's attitude in any way. Mr. Graham stated he intended to get rid of Barth in due time, either by obtaining his resignation or by dismissal, but he felt it was better, as he saw the whole problem, for it to be done gradually rather than as an issue in this particular matter.

Mr. Graham stated he wanted me to know of this situation and of his, Graham's, views about the same. I told Mr. Graham I appreciated his calling and advising me of this but that very frankly I could not in my own mind see how The Washington Post could disassociate itself from the writings of its editorial writers any more than I could disassociate myself from the writings or statements of any employee of this Bureau who might be doing it in a personal capacity and who might, in such writings, make statements supporting fascism, condemn civil liberties, and in general take a position entirely opposed to the principles for which the FBI stands.

I told Mr. Graham that I had been offered the opportunity to view the proofs of Barth's article a week or so ago but had refused to do so because I knew from Barth's previous writings and attitude that he was a fanatic in his hatred and hostility towards the FBI and that I considered him to be completely intellectually dishonest and an intellectual prostitute.

I stated I had been dismayed over the years at the extremely hostile attitude which The Washington Post had consistently taken towards my administration of the Bureau, starting as far back as 1938, and that certainly they had been absolutely consistent in their condemnation of the Bureau without obtaining the facts. I called Mr. Graham's attention to the saying which I have on my desk which was uttered by Mr. Bernard Baruch, namely: "A man is always entitled to his own opinion but he is never entitled to be mistaken in his facts." I stated that time and time again their editorial pages had carried criticism of this Bureau without being predicated, even substantively, upon a factual basis. I called attention to their editorials at the time of the Coplon case and Mr. Graham stated he fully appreciated that at that time the Bureau was not the one to blame but, as a matter of fact, made better reports on investigative work than any other Government agency, since he himself had been in the Government and had seen copies of all types of intelligence reports.

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I also called his attention to the campaign which The Post carried last Summer in regard to the overtime allegedly required by the Bureau of its employees. I stated that in this situation, no one from The Washington Post had endeavored to seek the facts in this matter. I stated it was particularly significant to me that we have such a large number of employees in the Bureau who have been here for 20, 25, 30 and 35 years and that it was also significant that we have in the service Agents whose sons have come into the organization. I also commented upon the matter of turnover, namely, that the FBI has the lowest turnover of any organization, its turnover being 8/10 of one per cent in the group of Special Agents. I pointed out that the turnover in the rest of the Government service averaged 2.03 per cent and the turnover for private industry averaged 4 1/2 per cent.

Mr. Graham stated that he was not in town when this campaign on overtime was being carried on and when he returned to the city, he realized that a mistake had been made. He stated that The Post had been in receipt of a number of phone calls and letters criticizing overtime but that this type of criticism was to be expected from ex-employees or disgruntled employees. I told Mr. Graham that we had given up long ago trying to call to The Post's attention any inaccuracies because I recalled one instance where a present editorial writer of The Post by the name of Kilpatrick had written an article criticizing the loyalty program, which article was so far from the truth that I had asked Mr. Nichols of this office to talk with Kilpatrick and point out to him the mistakes which appeared in his article. I told Mr. Graham that I had assumed, erroneously, that Kilpatrick was not intentionally misrepresenting the facts but would appreciate having his mistakes called to his attention. I stated instead of that, after Mr. Nichols talked to Kilpatrick, Kilpatrick had gone about stating he had been called in and "grilled" by the FBI. Mr. Graham did not know of this incident and stated he could hardly believe that Kilpatrick would act in this manner. I told him that it was a fact nevertheless. I stated that after this sorry experience I had instructed Mr. Nichols never to bother again trying to straighten out any of the inaccuracies which appeared in The Washington Post.

I did tell Mr. Graham that so far as I had been able to observe, the news reporting of The Post had been generally accurate and objective but that the editorial pages of his paper were horribly slanted and always, whenever the FBI was involved, completely distorted and malicious.

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Mr. Graham stated that he realized the problem which he had in his organization and believed he was gradually straightening it out, repeating that he felt the best way to handle it was not by any precipitate action but in a gradual way so that martyrs would not be made of persons whom he disagreed with just as strongly as I did.

The conference was entirely cordial and I think Mr. Graham understands my opinion of The Washington Post. I personally think Mr. Graham himself may be a very earnest individual who feels that by palliation, to a certain extent he can bring about a correction of a deplorable condition. This I somehow doubt.

Very truly yours,

John Edgar Hoover
Director

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